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## **Kansas City air quality measures set to address ozone levels**

Preliminary data indicates that the Kansas City region has failed to meet the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) health-based air quality standards. The Rocky Creek ozone monitor in northern Kansas City, Missouri, which is one of eight regional ozone monitors, registered eight-hour average ozone concentrations exceeding the standard on Friday, June 15.

The Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) had anticipated this violation, and in cooperation with the Missouri Department of Natural Resources, the Mid America Regional Council (MARC) and the Kansas City metro cities and counties, submitted a Kansas-specific plan to the EPA in May containing contingency measures to be put in place if the violation occurred.

"We came together and worked out a solution," said Dr. Ronald Hammerschmidt, KDHE Director of Environment. "We are confident that the additional measures outlined in the plan will have a positive impact on the air quality of Kansas City for many years to come."

The first measure proposed in the plan would require new emissions controls on older power plants and industrial boilers in Johnson and Wyandotte counties in Kansas. Idling restrictions would also be imposed for all five counties in the Kansas City air quality planning boundary.

In addition to the regulatory measures contained in the Kansas and Missouri plans, both states, local governments and members of the community have cooperated with MARC to develop a Clean Air Action Plan. The plan contains voluntary programs to reduce air pollution emissions. Local governments have also prepared outreach plans designed to educate the public and change behaviors that contribute to air pollution.

Over half of all ozone-forming pollutants are caused by everyday actions, such as driving, painting, refueling, and using gas-powered lawn and garden equipment. Approximately one-third of the regional emissions that contribute to Greater Kansas City's ground-level ozone problem come from cars and trucks. "Everybody plays a part in this problem," said Hammerschmidt. "Fortunately, everybody can just as easily be a part of the solution."

Small actions such as saving lawn-mowing and vehicle refueling for the evening, carpooling and using low-VOC paints and solvents can help reduce ozone pollution.

EPA air quality regulatory compliance falls into one of two categories: attainment and nonattainment. Greater Kansas City currently falls in the attainment category, but typically experiences 12 to 15 days each summer that do not meet federal air quality standards. Although the EPA has the option of designating Greater Kansas City a nonattainment area following a violation, the region could retain its clean air status if it puts in place new pollution controls.

Although the EPA considers this only a moderate concentration of ozone, the reading was high enough to raise the three-year average from the monitor above the national standard. The threshold for a violation at the Rocky Creek monitor was lower than usual this year due to poor air quality the region experienced in 2005 and 2006.

Ground-level ozone, sometimes referred to as smog, is one of six criteria pollutants designated by the EPA. It forms when nitrogen oxide (NOx) mixes with volatile organic compounds (VOCs) in the presence of heat and sunlight.